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SUBJECT: NATO: FEBRUARY 28TH HLTF AND NRC (ACE) MEETINGS

REF: STATE 19164 HLTF GUIDANCE

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Richard G. Olson, reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: At the February 28 HLTF, Allies agreed on key themes for the NATO-Russia Council Arms Control Experts (NRC (ACE)) meeting that followed the HLTF, and more generally for engaging Russia in the run-up to Bucharest. All who spoke stressed the need for a continued unified message; reiterated support for the parallel actions package as the way to achieve a solution with Russia; and argued for staying the course on the Allies, phased approach, to include continued NATO implementation, for responding to Russia's "suspension" of CFE implementation. The German rep raised with the U.S., UK, and French reps prior to the HLTF plenary the idea of eliciting a firm response on CFE from Russia by "tabling" and then making public the parallel actions package prior to Bucharest. At U.S. behest, the German rep tempered Germany's idea for the broader HLTF audience by joining the French rep to press for a more active NATO CFE Public Diplomacy strategy in the run-up to Bucharest.

¶12. (C) Allies rallied in the NRC (ACE) to deliver a consistent and clear message to Russia underscoring Allies' commitment to the Treaty but noting that NATO could not continue to implement the Treaty indefinitely without Russia's participation in its implementation; urging Russia to reconsider its suspension of implementation; and stressing that the parallel actions package was a creative and generous offer that addressed Russia's stated concerns about the Treaty. The Russian rep inveighed against alleged lack of "concessions" to Russia in the parallel actions package; delivered Russia's own readout of the February 19 U.S.-Russia bilateral meeting; and suggested that the best we could achieve by Bucharest would be agreement that all parties support CFE and want to continue working intensively to resolve differences. END SUMMARY.

Contacts and Bilaterals

¶13. (C) The U.S. HLTF Representative, State/VCI DAS Karin L. Look, briefed Allies on the February 19 U.S.-Russia bilateral discussions between Assistant Secretary Fried and MFA Deputy Minister, Director Antonov and provided a summary of the key points. She emphasized that the U.S. had used the discussions not only to underscore the negative impact of Russia's "suspension" on prospects for progress on resolving

the current CFE impasse, but also to stress that the current anomalous situation, with Allies implementing, while Russia is not, cannot be sustained indefinitely.

¶4. (C) France (Grand) briefed Allies on a bilateral meeting at the Political Director level (Kislyak-Araud) during which Russia raised the importance of eliminating the flank regime for Russia, and criticism of the parallel actions plan as including unreasonable requirements for Russia related to Georgia and Moldova and alleged U.S. walk-backs on those issues, from the position advanced in October, and displeasure with the progress/pace of the bilateral process. Grand said the French team retorted that Soviet-style negotiations ("what's mine is mine, but what's yours is negotiable") were not conducive to progress and that Russia needs to approach discussions more proactively, without preconditions. But he also noted considerable pessimism about Russian intentions in the wake of the meeting. (NOTE: When reporting on this meeting in closed company during the quad, Grand said Kislyak supported the idea of meeting in a small format (quad plus one), perhaps in Vienna. END NOTE)

¶5. (C) The German rep (Biontino) reported on Russia's refusal of Germany's February 13 CFE inspection notification. He said that Russian interlocutors who received the demarche that accompanied the notification (Anton Mazur) responded by rehashing Russia's six concerns about CFE, and highlighting the importance of abolition of the flank for Russia, the need for a collective ceiling on NATO set at 1989/90 ceilings, and the idea of a Conference of States Parties (SP) to discuss further adapting the Treaty while demonstrating flexibility on provisional application in the interim. (NOTE: During the quad meeting prior to the HLTF, Germany and France reported on joint working level talks set up by France and Germany with the MFA (Anton Mazur) in Moscow which included the points above, and inter alia, a "threat" that CFE would not survive NATO enlargement, an assessment that Russia had little room for maneuver and would not likely change its position post-elections, and a preference for a changed format from bilateral to quad plus one--a point which France, in particular, advocated and Germany reinforced with repeated calls for inclusiveness. END NOTE)

¶6. (C) The UK (Ford) informed the HLTF of a bilateral meeting he had in Vienna with Russian Chief Arms Control Rep Ulyanov, who continued to push for breaking up the elements of the package, floated the notion of starting with a "blank sheet" for a new Treaty, and insisted "suspension" and Russia's continued refusal of inspections could not be reversed as it was written into law. The UK pointed out to Ulyanov that the "blank sheet" idea is pure fantasy and inquired, rhetorically, why it was seemingly impossible for Russia to say yes to generous Allied proposals. Turkey (Gun) mentioned a Minister-level February 22 meeting in Moscow which only addressed CFE briefly with the repetition of known positions.

HLTF Discusses the Way Ahead

¶7. (C) Allies agreed on a unified message both for the NRC (ACE) and for engaging Russia on CFE issues in the run up to Bucharest. The key elements of the message echoed themes from U.S.-Russia bilateral exchanges:
-- Russia's suspension has made it harder, not easier, to solve the current CFE impasse and jeopardized a valuable regime that is at the core of the NATO-Russia relationship;
-- the current anomalous implementation situation, where NATO implements CFE and Russia does not, cannot last forever, and NATO would need to review its position after Bucharest;
-- NATO's proposals for ending the impasse on ratification of A/CFE and the fulfillment of Istanbul Commitments are reasonable, creative, and generous, and Russia should respond in kind;
-- the parallel actions plan supported by all Allies is a package: Allies won't work on individual elements of it, like provisional application or a definition of substantial

combat forces, until the entire text is agreed.

¶8. (C) While the NRC (ACE) discussion betrayed no hint of Alliance disagreement on substance or approach, in the HLTF (and more so, in bilateral meetings and the Quad see below), there was considerable diversity of view on how NATO can most productively use the run-up to the Bucharest NATO Summit to make progress on CFE and frame NATO's public diplomacy position for the longer term. The French highlighted, and all other Allies agreed, that if CFE should fall apart, it must be clear that Russia, not NATO, is responsible. To that end, France and Germany support a pro-active public message to Russia prior to the Summit, outlining the generous proposals the U.S. has advanced on behalf of NATO in the parallel actions plan, and calling upon Russia to respond.

-- All Allies who spoke in the HLTF were attracted to the idea of a more active NATO PD strategy on CFE, but several, including the U.S., highlighted the need to get the details right in any message intended to engage Russia prior to the Summit. The UK offered that Allies should ramp up the PD message by setting out what Allies have done using a hopeful tone rather than forcing a make or break situation. Turkey understood, and supported, the notion of a press kit or paper that made the Allied position and efforts more understandable, but was not keen on expressing the specifics of Allied positions more broadly. Turkey called for the NATO International Staff (I.S.) to develop a paper on this concept, and the Chair (Deputy Assistance Secretary General Simmons) noted, in summarizing the meeting, that the I.S. would assemble a fact sheet outlining the Allied position.

-- The Czech Republic and Romania were supportive of a more dynamic PD strategy, but were also eager to address how long Allies would continue to implement the Treaty. Canada suggested, in thinking beyond Bucharest, that it would be useful to consider how Allies should signal to Russia that the current situation is not indefinite and that there are consequences to "suspension." The U.S. (supported by UK, NL, NO, TU, FR, Ger) cautioned against creating a crisis or watershed moment at Bucharest, and reminded all of the need to demonstrate clear and steady resolve through Bucharest and then come together to reassess. France concurred that it was not advisable to set artificial, event-driven deadlines, and Germany noted no intention to force the schedule, but rather intensify efforts on three fronts at Bucharest - PD, diplomatic, and the blame game.

-- France advanced the idea of using the Summit to record a commitment by NATO and Russia to redouble efforts to get CFE back on track, but acknowledged that this seemed unlikely, given differences on core issues. There was a clear consensus to use the NAC communiqu, at a minimum, to highlight NATO's effort to address Russia's CFE concerns in a forthcoming and generous way, and call on Moscow to respond in kind.

Other issues at HLTF

¶9. (C) The U.S. thanked Germany for proceeding with its February 13 inspection notification and noted the need for continued attempts to inspect Russia during the new Treaty year beginning in the latter half of March. Look said the U.S. would be willing to attempt an inspection in late March (at the start of the new Treaty year), but said we would defer to other allies who wanted to take this on. (This planning question will be settled at the March 7 VCC.) The Chair indicated that Armenian authorities had indicated they would welcome the possibility of an Ally attempting an inspection of Russian forces in Armenia.

¶10. (C) The I.S. provided a readout of VCC Experts, Meetings and current working papers, noting Russia's unprecedented level of inspection and evaluation activity under Vienna Document. The Chair commented on the effective efforts of Allies in the JCG-T to organize a focused dialogue in the JCG, a sentiment shared by many Allies, and the need to continue this dialogue as part of the multi-faceted Allied approach to discussion. Norway and Netherlands raised the expectation that CSBMs would be addressed during the Annual Implementation Assessment Meeting (AIAM) in Vienna. Look, as

per guidance, clarified the U.S. position on CSBMs, emphasizing that the U.S. remains opposed to discussion of any substantive proposals by Russia.

¶11. (C) The I.S. Food for Thought Paper on "From Now to Bucharest - The HLTF and CFE" (HLTF-N(2008)0005-REV1) served as a framework for discussion in the HLTF. Look noted that the U.S. had specific comments on the content of the paper and would raise suggestions, such as deleting the paragraphs on Ambassador Rogozin's comments and focusing on President Putin's statements, directly with the I.S.

¶12. (C) Raising NATO's Profile in the Fields of Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-proliferation. Allies agreed that the CFE text in paragraph 6A reflected HLTF agreed text, but that the CFE-related conclusions in paragraph 10 needed additional review and input. (NOTE: These CFE-related conclusions have been subsequently dropped altogether from the paper. END NOTE)

NRC (ACE) - ALLIES UNIFIED AND ON MESSAGE

¶13. (C) A total of 16 Allies spoke, some more than once in the NRC Arms Control Experts (ACE) meeting that followed the HLTF. The meeting opened with 15 NATO speakers following one after the other in rapid sequence, all delivering variations of the same message. Prior to the meeting several Allies stressed the need to ensure the Russian team had a clear line for their reporting cable to Moscow, and the NATO speakers did not mince words: Russia has set back prospects for a CFE solution with its suspension of Treaty implementation, and Russia should reverse it; Russian positions on many elements of the parallel actions plan are unreasonable and unjustifiable (read: flank, NATO collective ceiling, Moldova, Georgia); NATO cannot continue to implement CFE forever if Russia won't participate; the parallel actions plan and U.S. efforts have NATO Allies, support and Russia should be more creative instead of finding ways to complicate a deal. High Points (in addition to the points just reported):

-- Turkey observed that it has shown "utmost flexibility" in the past when Russia demonstrated the need for an increase in its flank equipment entitlements, and would do so again. But the idea of abolishing the flank regime for Russia is a non-starter for Ankara. He added, rather sharply, that Turkey would welcome Kislyak to Ankara for his many-times postponed visit, including addressing CFE.

-- France cited the need to think about a positive message at Bucharest.

-- Germany said that all Russia's six CFE concerns are addressed in the parallel action plan, and noted that FM Steinmeier had publicly underscored CFE's importance for European security. He also stressed the importance of "inclusiveness" in discussion of any CFE solution.

-- Belgium (Comment: who is sometimes outside the mainstream on CFE. End comment) delivered a ringing endorsement of the parallel actions plan and then accused Russia of changing its position and priorities, with the effect of making resolution harder. He summed up that first, Russia calls for ratification of the Adapted Treaty. Then Russia says A/CFE isn't good enough and has to be changed. Then Russia suspends implementation of the current Treaty, arguing that this will help to save it. Suspension will not help save CFE, but will erode the regime, he said.

-- Italy delivered an unusually strong and well-constructed message, stressing that Russia's suspension is not going to help save CFE, despite Moscow's claim; it's going to make resolution more difficult. Provisional application is a non-starter in current circumstances. CFE is not unfair to Russia. We should agree to examine the Treaty after entry into force to see if it needs updating.

-- Spain and the Czech Republic, normally on opposite ends of the spectrum regarding Russia, were both uncharacteristically terse, said the parallel actions package is good and generous, and warned that the current situation, with Allies implementing CFE and Russia not, cannot last indefinitely. Russia should reconsider the suspension decision.

-- Norway lamented that CFE is a pillar of his nation's security, and that it would wither away unless we resolved the issues before us.

-- UK, Romania, Greece, and Lithuania were among those who most pointedly pushed Russia to think about the future. The parallel actions plan, with its creative elements on Istanbul, was a good deal for Russia, they stressed. It was hard to see what Russia expected to achieve though its suspension, which could only make hard issues more difficult, and erode the Treaty's viability. The Lithuanian said "there should be no illusions: Russia is making a strategic choice." The UK asked how Russia intended to proceed.

-- The U.S. NRC (ACE) rep Jennifer Laurendeau, speaking at the end of the opening tour de table, noted that the U.S. had recently hosted a Russian CFE team in Washington for another round of businesslike discussions on the parallel actions plan, reiterated concerns raised by others about Russia's suspension including both its impact on the Treaty and on the goal of military transparency and mutual cooperation that is at the core of the NATO-Russia relationship urged the group to reflect on the way ahead, including what might be achieved by Bucharest.

¶14. (C) Several Allies, including Germany, Turkey, Lithuania, and the U.S. came back more than once when Russia presented a detailed, but confusing, readout of the February 19 U.S.-Russia bilateral talks and an offer by the Russian rep, Ambassador Ulyanov that would allegedly lead to Russia's resumption of its CFE implementation.

Russia Responds

¶15. (C) Ulyanov's long, largely predictable response to Allies, questions and concerns gave no hint that Russia is hoping to resolve the CFE impasse anytime soon. At its core was the familiar litany of Russian concerns about CFE's "unfairness" to Russia e.g., the flank regime and the fact that some members of the Eastern Group of States have joined NATO, the idea that NATO had never taken Russia's concerns seriously until they implemented their "suspension", NATO's long insistence on fulfillment of the Istanbul commitments, which, he said, meant in practice that Russia undertook concrete actions to pave the way to entry into force of the Adapted CFE Treaty, while NATO "sat back and watched" but did not move forward on ratification of the Adapted Treaty, the fact that Russia's concerns on the flank were held at the highest political levels and would have to be addressed, and the idea that Russia's suspension was a way of calling attention to these Russian concerns, not a step intended to destroy the Treaty.

¶16. (C) At one point in his intervention, the Russian rep offered that Russia would resume implementation of the CFE Treaty if NATO would agree to move forward in the NRC (ACE) on 1) discussion of conditions for accession to A/CFE by new NATO Allies; 2) a definition of "substantial combat forces;" 3) discussion of lower territorial ceilings for NATO members in order to "compensate" Russia for NATO enlargement. Ulyanov also suggested Vienna as the context for a discussion of "substantial combat forces." Allies didn't take the bait: Germany responded immediately that the parallel actions package had to be dealt with as a whole. The U.S. stressed the "package" theme also, but observed that the high level attention NATO Allies have given, and continue to give, to Russia's CFE concerns should justify ending the suspension, if its purpose was to focus discussion on those

concerns. Laurendeau added that at the end of the day Russia should end its suspension because it wants to preserve the Treaty and remove obstacles to A/CFE's ratification by all 30 States Parties.

-- Comment: While it is impossible to say for certain whether the Russian rep's "conditions" for ending the Russian suspension were a serious, instructed proposal, corridor chat after the meeting suggested that Allies did not read them that way. Most found it not credible that Ulyanov might be in a position to offer conditions for ending a suspension that had been ordered by President Putin. End comment.

¶17. (C) Ulyanov's second surprise was to ask Russian CFE expert Anton Mazur to provide a read out of the U.S.-Russia bilateral talks on February 19. Mazur focused on one element of Ulyanov's mantra: that the parallel actions package contained no concessions by NATO. He went further, and suggested that the U.S. had walked back important offers on some issues since the October 2 plus 2 meeting, while adding new elements that suggested to Russia that the U.S. was trying to resolve the frozen conflicts via CFE. Laurendeau responded to Mazur's long readout only briefly, noting that all the elements of the package that are now on the table have been essentially the same, though elaborated, since October; that whether you call them "concessions" or creative thinking, the package reflects major movement by NATO and others, like Georgia and Moldova, on longstanding positions, including through the offer to move on ratification of Adapted CFE in parallel with (not in the wake of) Russian fulfillment of the Istanbul commitments; and agreeing with Mazur's characterization of the talks as businesslike, though without progress on the four key issues (flank, collective ceiling on NATO, Georgia, and Moldova).

¶18. (C) Russia closed the meeting with a suggestion in response to queries by the U.S. and others regarding Russia's envisioned timeline and outcome on the current CFE impasse that the most that could be expected on CFE by the time of Bucharest would be NATO-Russia agreement that we are committed to CFE and are prepared to continue intensive dialogue to overcome current misunderstandings.

Meetings on the Margins

¶19. (C) U.S. rep Look and team met on the margins of the HLTF with the UK, France, and Germany, and the Baltic States. Look, accompanied by Laurendeau, also held bilaterals with HODs from Canada, Romania and Turkey. At his invitation, Look also met Russian rep Ulyanov for dinner; she was accompanied by Laurendeau and U.S. JCG rep Neighbour.

¶20. At the key Allies (quad) meeting, Germany and France proposed ideas for a NATO statement on CFE that would be issued prior to Bucharest, challenging Moscow publicly to

respond constructively to our CFE proposals at or prior to the Summit. Germany said that they were under instruction to raise some variation of these ideas in the full HLTF. Following consultations with Washington, the U.S. team was able to steer the proposal, in a more constructive direction.

-- The initial German proposal was to get a formal NATO imprimatur on the parallel actions plan and make it public, with the message that NATO has developed reasonable and generous proposals on all the issues Russia has raised regarding the CFE Treaty, and call on Russia to respond.

-- The French variant was to develop a short NATO statement that makes the point that NATO has responded constructively and creatively to all of Russia's CFE concerns and add some details such as the headers from the parallel actions package calling on Russia to respond in a similar spirit.

-- The U.S. demurred with regard to the German proposal.

They said it would not be easy, and maybe impossible, to get all Allies to agree to every word of the package; it would be problematic to go public with language on Moldova and Georgia; and it would probably infuriate Russia to see negotiating text made public. The UK remarked that the idea was interesting, but cautioned on the necessity of carefully weighing whether it would actually increase prospects for success and of not distracting attention from other Allied issues for the Summit. Discussion thereafter focused on the French variant, and the hurdles that would accompany it. The French stressed that they not only want to draw out a Russian response, but prepare to ensure that any blame for lack of progress on CFE or the loss of the regime itself lies firmly with Russia.

-- COMMENT: While the concept of putting the onus on Russia for responding constructively on CFE is attractive, the French-German willingness to challenge Russia so publicly in the run-up to Bucharest was surprising. The wisdom of such an approach in the context of overall preparations for the Summit is not clear. Berlin's motivations for advancing such a potentially confrontational proposal are a major question. If Putin rejects the package, would Berlin and Paris view this as clearing the way to begin negotiating a new Treaty? Is the goal simply to advance Steinmeier's ostensible emphasis on arms control at the Summit? The French variant could have merit in establishing a clearer, more assertive public defense of NATO's CFE position, but it would require careful handling to ensure the statement wouldn't have the effect, if issued prior to the Summit, of distracting from other issues on the Allied Summit agenda. It was clear in the meeting that Paris had not thought about the modalities: France did not have a notion of who would issue any NATO public statement on CFE, or exactly when. END COMMENT

-- Also in the Quad, Germany and France alleged that Russia is keen for a Quad plus 1 (citing a Kislyak-Araud meeting several weeks ago and working level meetings with Anton Mazur in Moscow prior to the U.S.-Russia bilateral meeting). France, especially, is interested in such an event before Bucharest noting (including privately to Look) that France "insists" on such an expanded format although they are not particular to the location. Germany reiterated the need for inclusiveness in support of France's position. Look made clear that Russia has been sending sharply different messages on this matter to U.S. negotiators.

¶20. (C) Turkey. U.S. rep Look and Laurendeau met at length with Turkish HLTF rep Gun to go over the status of the parallel actions package in the wake of the February 19 U.S.-Russia bilateral meeting, and to invite his thoughts on options for framing the NATO position that Allies are prepared to review the operation of the Adapted Treaty after it enters into force. Gun said that at the end of the day Ankara could probably live with the minor variation of NATO's extraordinary conference proposal on future review of A/CFE that is contained in the U.S. proposal (which drops "as appropriate" and swaps hortatory language). He said he did not think Ankara could live with actually mentioning the five letter word "flank", specifically in the review context.

¶21. (C) Romania and Canada. In separate bilateral meetings with Romanian HLTF Rep Micula and Canadian rep Poupart, Look and Laurendeau went over in detail the February 19 discussions and discussed the way ahead, including the need for a firm line on CFE in the context of preparations for the Bucharest Summit, and a clear message to Russia in the NRC that its suspension had harmed, not helped, prospects for resolving CFE.

¶22. (C) Baltic States. The U.S. team briefly met with HLTF reps from the Baltic states in order to gauge their reaction to the February 26 defense planning consultations with the U.S. European Command and interagency representatives in Stuttgart, Germany. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania each reported a very positive reaction to U.S. engagement, a sense that the U.S. views their concerns as legitimate, and high

expectations for continued engagement with EUCOM planners. Follow on meetings are being finalized for the May timeframe when a EUCOM team will travel to each capital for bilateral discussions prior to meeting again on a trilateral basis.

¶23. (C) DAS Look, joined by Laurendeau and Neighbour, accepted Amb Ulyanov,s invitation to dinner. Ulyanov,s harangue, which began before beverages were ordered and continued non-stop through dessert, repeated many elements of his NRC (ACE) presentation, minus any suggestion of ending the Russian suspension. His theme was clear: he wants to be charged with working out a definition of substantial combat forces, either in the NRC (ACE) or in the JCG, and he wants that work to begin now. Asked by DAS Look how work on individual elements of the package would contribute to resolving differences concerning the four core issues in the parallel action plan, Ulyanov essentially (though not very cleverly) said they would not. He said that in meetings between Acting U/S Rood and Kislyak in Budapest, Rood had indicated an openness to work on elements of the parallel actions package in Vienna. Look countered that her readout of the Budapest meeting did not mention any such conclusion, but did note that Kislyak had (inaccurately) accused A/S Fried of "threatening" consequences after Bucharest if Russia,s suspension of CFE persisted. (Comment: this was presumably a much-sifted reference to A/S Fried,s statement that NATO Allies could not continue indefinitely to implement CFE while Russia did not, and that they would have to reassess their position after Bucharest. End comment) Throughout the discussion over dinner it was made clear that the Russian reps had been given no sense by Moscow that it feels any urgency to resolve the current impasse or return to implementing CFE.

Next HLTF Meeting

¶24. (SBU) Next Meeting. Allies agreed to the I.S. proposal for the next HLTF meeting to be held on March 27.
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